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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANTANANARIVO 000227

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SUBJECT: "GOM" PRIORITIES MET WITH DIPLOMATIC SILENCE

REF: ANTANANARIVO 204

Classified By: DCM ERIC STROMAYER FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

11. (C) SUMMARY: Madagascar's "High Transitional Authority" (HAT) convened leaders of the diplomatic corps on March 31 to announce its priorities for the coming months, and advance a conciliatory posture towards the international community in Antananarivo. Transition Minister of Finance Benja Razafimahaleo listed five key areas of focus: food security, internal security, good governance, stabilization of public finances, and the creation of new institutions of government. The audience, composed mostly of DCMs or equivalent, took notes but remained silent; none present were prepared to engage with the HAT. Despite growing opposition both on the streets of Tana and in foreign capitals, Madagascar's new leadership appears determined to persevere, and confident that the international community will eventually fall in line - against all current indications. END SUMMARY.

PUSHING AHEAD ON THE HAT AGENDA  
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12. (C) HAT Prime Minister Roindefo Monja and ten of his cabinet members held today's meeting to present priorities for the transition period; no mention was made of the embattled regime's current difficulties, and the two speakers did their best to present an image of stability and determination. No doubt focused by the looming budget crisis, Monja stated that Madagascar's problems were "between Malagasy", but recognized that they can't survive in isolation. After three months of conflict, he continued, there is now freedom of speech and assembly (as indicated, ironically, by the daily pro-Ravalomanana demonstrations in downtown Antananarivo), and it is thus time to get on with rebuilding the country. Minister of Finance Razafimahaleo reiterated his confidence that "the international community is with us", despite SADC's call this morning for the unconditional reinstatement of former president Marc Ravalomanana.

13. (C) Monja confirmed that the HAT intends to hold a National Meeting ("Assises Nationale") on April 2-3, designed to include members of civil society, political parties, and business in order to promote national reconciliation and iron out the details of the transition government's "Council for Economic and Social Recovery" (CRES). The idea has few supporters outside of the HAT, however, as most NGOs and political parties that haven't been co-opted into the government demand that such a meeting be run by a neutral organization, and with a much broader agenda. The largest grouping of such "independents" is the Collective of Citizens and Civic Organizations (CCOC), who recently made public their opposition to the HAT event, and began promoting a competing "National Convention" to be held at a later date.

Supporters of former President Marc Ravalomanana's party, TIM, have also indicated their intention to boycott.  
(COMMENT: Monja appeared unconcerned, but a poorly-attended National Meeting will only underscore the HAT's legitimacy problem. END COMMENT)

#### FIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE TRANSITION

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¶4. (C) Per HAT Minister of Finance Razafimahaleo, the five key priorities for the transition are as follows:

- Food security: Due to months of crisis and unstable prices on staple foods, the HAT will fight famine, and help the urban poor who are having difficulty feeding themselves.  
(NOTE: This priority matches the HAT's recent plan to distribute subsidized rice from government stocks, although current estimates indicate that this will only last a few weeks at best. END NOTE)

- Internal security: The HAT will work to reestablish the rule of law, while supporting human rights and free expression.

- Good governance: This will begin with national reconciliation, and include the re-establishment of ethical politics and economic policies designed to promote liberalism and real competition.

- Stabilization of public finances: According to Razafimahaleo, "the coffers are empty", so the GOM will pursue austerity and respect for budgetary procedures. The

ANTANANARI 00000227 002 OF 002

state will also recover all taxes owed by Tiko.

- The creation of new institutions of state: To prepare for Madagascar's "Fourth Republic", the HAT will revise the constitution and redesign the government. They will then hold a referendum on the constitution, followed by legislative and presidential elections. No timeframe was given.

"MAYBE IT'S TOO EARLY"

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¶5. (C) COMMENT: Razafimahaleo and Monja kept their speeches short, and then turned the microphone to the assembled diplomats; an awkward minute passed before Monja was forced to close the meeting with a brief recognition that perhaps it was too early to expect feedback or commentary. Today's gathering was the HAT's first substantive encounter with the diplomatic community, and they were no doubt disappointed at the chilly response: boycotted by Ambassadors, the meeting was a stark illustration of the HAT's continued isolation.

¶6. (C) HAT President Andry Rajoelina today indicated that he is considering pulling out of SADC altogether ("Madagascar's membership to this organization is not really necessary"), and although Monja stated his readiness to seek national reconciliation, the HAT's plans for a National Meeting this week will only further alienate the new opposition. A quick review of the HAT's 44 members, most of whom were named today, indicates that only two were affiliated with the former government, despite promises of balanced representation. The HAT appears determined to push forward on its agenda (the National Meeting, and the transition government as they have designed it), unwilling to retreat on tactical errors (such as suspending parliament), and unlikely to deliver on its promises until it can engage the growing opposition. In the meantime, they will continue to be frustrated by the international community's failure to provide them with support. END COMMENT.  
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